

Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

Witness Statement

**Statement of Bruce Ward
Executive Director of the Continental Divide Trail Alliance, Inc.
Presented to the Congress of the United States
US House of Representatives House Resources Committee,
Forest and Forest Health Subcommittee
March 16, 2001**

**Subject:
Effective Community Involvement in National Restoration and
Recreation Efforts: Obstacles and Solutions**

Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk to you about our experiences as a partner with the land management agencies, especially the USDA Forest Service. My wife Paula, and I have been working on the effort to complete and maintain the congressionally designated Continental Divide National Scenic Trail since 1994. We helped to found the Continental Divide Trail Alliance with then vice-chair of the National Forest Foundation, Stephen Fausel. Our organization was specifically formed to assist the Forest Service with its congressional mandate to complete and maintain this national treasure.

We have come a long way in a relatively short time, thanks in many respects, Mr. Chairman to your encouragement and support. Our successes have been many, but yes we are faced with some challenges and frustrations.

I would like to start out by providing a few examples of the successes we have had and then turn to areas of concern and problems that need to be addressed.

- In 1997 we coordinated an effort called "Uniting Along the Divide". This massive volunteer undertaking brought corporate supporters, land managers and volunteer organizations together for the first time to help us inventory the status of the Trail. It was truly an historic event that focused unprecedented involvement on the needs of the Trail. It also helped us gain insight as to how our efforts could be utilized to assist increasingly hard pressed land managers. Since the completion of this effort we have developed a Ten-Year Plan, to complete the Trail by the year 2008.

Ray Hanson, an employee of the Bureau of Land Management in Rawlins, Wyoming is a fine example of how volunteer enthusiasm for this project could be harnessed. He recruited a variety of users, including equestrians, mountain bikers and hikers to investigate various routes for a critical linkage of the Trail in southern Wyoming. This effort would have cost the federal government thousands of dollars. Ray got it done for next to nothing. His efforts earned him our Land Manager of the Year award for 1997.

- Tim Pohlman, a Forest Service employee on the Gila National Forest in New Mexico is another great example of a land manager making the most of the momentum we have developed for the CDT, often called the "King of Trails". We received a call at our office from a college in Texas that was seeking to put some of the students to work, instead of participating in the usual spring break activities. We called Tim and he quickly seized the opportunity to maximize the potential of this free labor offer. Since then he has expanded the program to include students from many other states as well as from overseas. The value of their work is estimated at \$185,000 over the past three years.
- Steve Stratton, a volunteer from Boulder, Colorado is another example of how our organization has accomplished so much with minimal resources. Steve called our organization to say that he had read about our efforts and felt he just had to be a part of "our cause" and offered his services. More than just coming out and working on the Trail he has helped to develop our "Adopt-A-Trail" program and in mapping to identify the Trail's needs and help track our progress. Essential and "behind the scenes" work is being done by Steve.
- Lou Tyler is a retiree in Winter Park, Colorado who also exemplifies the kind of people that are breathing life into this magnificent Trail. Lou and his group of fellow senior citizens have adopted an especially breath-taking section of the CDT in Grand County, Colorado. For several years they have dedicated a significant amount of time and energy to the Trail. They have helped in clearing, signing, trailhead and fence building, just about every aspect of trail maintenance. Steve and Lou have been recognized as Volunteers of the Year by the CDTA.
- Our success in gaining private sector financial support should also be mentioned. We have raised well over a three million dollars from private foundations and corporations like the Fausel, Richard King Mellon, Gates Family, Amgen and Great Outdoors Colorado Foundations and REI (Recreational Equipment Inc.), L.L. Bean, Kelty, Vasque, Vibram, Coleman, Jansport, Eastern Mountain Sports and a myriad of other have that have provided us with essential funds to help our organization grow. We also have received contributions from well over 3000 individuals.
- We also have been fortunate in getting assistance from dozens of other local and national outdoor recreation organizations. The Backcountry Horsemen of America have been especially key to our success in getting the Trail built and maintained in remote locations. The Partnership for the National Trail System, the Colorado Mountain Club, Volunteers for Outdoors Colorado, the Colorado Trail Foundation, New Mexico Mountain Club, New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors, the Montana Conservation Corps, the National Outdoor Leadership School, the Helena Outdoor Club, American Hiking Society, and the International Mountain Biking Association are just a few examples of organizations that have joined in this effort to build and maintain the "King of Trails."
- The CDTA took part in several of the Forest Service Recreation Agenda public meetings last year and we are pleased with the final document produced. The key now, obviously, is getting the necessary support internally for the fulfillment of that shared vision.

I think you will agree that the support and desire of the United States Congress, the American people, both those near to the Trail and from across the country, and at least some of the land managers is strong, so what are the challenges?

- Money to the ground: Part of our frustration, and that of many people, both in and out of the Forest Service, has been the siphoning off of precious resources at many levels. So called "Taps" taken at

virtually every level of the agency result in a relatively minimal trickle down to the field.

- **Accountability:** For the last few years we have been successful in getting substantial "add-on" earmarks to the Forest Service budget specifically for the CDT. We have been included in the agency's allocation discussions and feel that significant progress is being made in prioritizing Trail projects. We have also have found, in some instances, that some districts are unable to track how those additional funds have been utilized. Needless to say, this can be extremely frustrating.
- **Personnel in the field:** As the efforts of the CDTA and many other volunteer groups become more and more successful we have the potential of making a tremendous impact on the deteriorating recreation infrastructure on our public lands. However, we have found it to become increasingly difficult to gain the necessary agency supervision and enthusiasm for working with the volunteers.
- **Aging workforce:** A related concern has to do with the demographics of the Forest Service personnel. Much of the hard earned expertise and experience in critical backcountry skills is being lost to an aging workforce that is on the brink of (or already has) retired. We must rebuild the agency's ability to maintain recreation infrastructure, much of which was created by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.
- **Inter-Agency Collaboration:** The Secretary of Agriculture and ultimately the United States Forest Service has the overall responsibility for the completion and maintenance of this National Scenic Trail. The Trail does, however, travel thru three National Parks, one National Monument and eight Bureau of Land Management Resource Areas. Getting all of these jurisdictions on the same page has been, shall we say, a challenge. Increasing interagency cooperation to minimize frustrations is another obstacle we must overcome. Involving all the agencies in the completion of the CDT Ten-Year Plan has been a great tool to develop that collaboration.
- Another important area that needs attention is what many would call a lack of leadership. Making volunteerism and partnerships with non-profits and corporations looking for a way to "give something back" has been lacking and should be an important part of the agency's agenda.

I would like to conclude by saying that many of the people that count on us to be their voice for the Continental Divide Trail are frustrated, but ultimately hopeful that we can be part of a team that will insure the future of recreation on our public lands. Thank you again for giving us this opportunity to be heard.

Trail History and Background

Thirty years ago Congress devised the framework for developing a nationwide system of trails in America by passing the National Trails System Act. The Continental Divide Trail is the backbone of today's system of nineteen Congressionally designated national scenic and historic trails.

In 1978 Congress designated the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail due to its magnificent and unique character. When completed, the Trail will stretch 3,100 miles and travel from Canada to Mexico through some of the most beautiful and challenging country in the world. The route goes through 25 National Forests, 13 Wildernesses, 3 National Parks, 1 National Monument and 8 Bureau of Land Management resource areas.

The CDT represents the most scenic, challenging and culturally diverse trail in America. Traveling along

this corridor is the ultimate journey for any outdoors person. Knowing that this precious resource is protected is just as important for many others.

Due to limited budgets and resources, the federal agencies have not been able to allocate sufficient funding and resources to complete the Trail. In Colorado, approximately 90% of the nearly 760 miles is usable, but much of that trail is in very poor condition and not up to National Scenic Trail standards. The CDTA has identified 526 miles of the CDT in Colorado that need either planning, new construction, reconstruction, relocation out of sensitive areas and off roads, and/or sufficient marking. In addition, the CDTA is targeting areas along the CDT that may experience heavy use and would benefit from interpretive signing.

Continental Divide Trail Alliance

The Continental Divide Trail Alliance (CDTA) was formed in 1995 to assist the federal land management agencies in the completion, management and protection of the Trail. The CDTA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with over one thousand members. Increasing pressures from development, rising land costs, popularization of the West, and decreases in federal funding are threatening the completion of the Trail. It was imperative that the CDTA be established to increase the public's awareness and involvement in completing one of the most unique and scenic ecosystems in the world.

CDTA Mission Statement

"To construct, manage and preserve a public back country trail along the full length of the Continental Divide from Canada to Mexico and to link its significant resources with the assistance of volunteers and public and private partnerships. To develop an appreciation of and enjoyment in America's natural lands through education and the opportunity to experience the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail."

Continental Divide Trail Alliance Goals and Objectives

To build, maintain, manage and protect the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail by:

- Developing an efficient and effective membership organization that fulfills the needs of the public and supports the federal land management agencies.
- Coordinating with local and regional grassroots groups, individuals, private businesses and government agencies to plan, design, build, maintain and manage the CDT.
- Increasing the visibility of and developing a constituency for the CDT.
- Developing and implementing a fundraising plan for the CDT.
- Educating the public about environmental and recreational ethics, and the historical, cultural and recreational significance of the CDT.
- Encouraging the public to become more actively involved in land management decisions.

Current Programs and Activities

Current CDTA programs and activities include:

CDTA Adopt-A-Trail Program

Key to long-term protection of the CDT is a fully developed maintenance and reporting program. The CDTA is recruiting and coordinating volunteers to maintain segments of the CDT.

Implementation of the CDT Ten-Year Strategic Plan

An action plan to complete the CDT by the year 2008 was initiated by the CDTA and adopted by the land managers in 1998. The CDTA coordinated land manager workshops to identify CDT related issues, projects & estimated costs.

Volunteerism

Volunteers are key to the development and maintenance of the CDT. The CDTA is coordinating sixteen volunteer projects in 1999 to work on 60 challenging miles of the Trail. Others will help us scout new routes and work with the land managers. In addition, we are working with many clubs along the Trail to perform trail work. The CDTA expects volunteer labor to exceed \$200,000 in 1999.

Trail Construction and Maintenance

The CDTA works with the land managers to identify and rank CDT needs each year. Needs range from building new trail to purchasing rights-of-ways. The CDTA raises money, recruits volunteers & works on issues to benefit the Trail.

CDT Long Distance Planning Guide

To better serve CDT users, the CDTA wrote and published a planning guide booklet specifically to educate and inform the public about the CDT. This publication will help to ensure safe and enjoyable experiences.

Advocacy Work

The CDTA travels to Washington DC at least twice a year to meet with land managers and to increase Congressional support and funding for the Trail. The CDTA requested a \$2.5 million add-on earmark from Congress to the Forest Service budget in 2002. This request is being supported Congressman McInnis.

The CDTA is proud of its work in cooperation with dozens of other non-profit organizations, including:

American Hiking Society

American Hiking Society is a recreation-based, conservation organization working to cultivate a nation of hikers dedicated to establishing, protecting, and maintaining foot trails in America. Their 13,000 individual members and 135 hiking club members contribute to this national effort.

The Backcountry Horsemen of America (BCHA)

BCHA has 114 chapters fourteen states: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming with over 14,000 members donating over \$8.5 million dollars in volunteer labor over the last five years.

Partnership for the National Trail System

During the five years 1995-1999, 22 organizations collaborating in direct partnership with the Forest Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management contributed at least 2.3 million volunteer hours to build and maintain the then 20 National Scenic and Historic Trails, equivalent to over \$28 million dollars. In addition over \$21 million has been donated in direct cash or donated value of materials and in-kind services.

Volunteers for Outdoors Colorado

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado's (VOC) mission is to motivate and enable citizens to be active stewards of Colorado's public lands, thereby creating enthusiastic and beneficial stewardship of Colorado's natural and cultural resources. Over the past 17 years, VOC has motivated and enabled more than 40,000 citizens to be active stewards of Colorado's natural resources successfully completing 158 projects worth over \$7.0 million. In addition the VOC_Clearinghouse maintains a comprehensive listing of natural resource volunteer and internship opportunities across Colorado. Designed to connect volunteers with stewardship positions, the clearinghouse offers over 900 opportunities with 250 agencies.

International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA)

IMBA's mission is to promote mountain bicycling opportunities that are environmentally sound and socially responsible. Since 1988, IMBA has been bringing out the best in mountain biking by encouraging low-impact riding, volunteer trail work participation, cooperation among different trail user groups, and innovative trail management solutions.

IMBA's worldwide network includes 32,000 individual members, more than 400 bicycle clubs, more than 100 corporate partners and an equal number of bicycle retailer members. IMBA's members live in all 50 U.S. states, most Canadian provinces and in 30 other countries.

#